

CEPPS/IRI Bulgaria Report: April 2005
Bulgaria: Political Party Assistance Program for Parliamentary Elections 2005
USAID Cooperative Agreement Number 183-A-00-05-00101-00
Project Dates: January 1, 2005 – June 30, 2005
Total Budget: \$200,000 Expenses to date: \$21,945
Project # 8051

I. SUMMARY

As Bulgaria begins to prepare for the summer 2005 parliamentary elections, the political parties face a crisis of voter apathy. Political infighting, internal disorganization, and a series of very public battles among political leaders have significantly contributed to widespread public disillusionment with the country's political institutions and to deep skepticism among voters about their ability to change their lives for the better through elections. Efforts to promote issue based campaigning and to encourage voter participation will therefore be crucial to the elections' success. IRI is working with four major political parties to provide assistance and training in campaign planning; issue identification and message development; grassroots organization and voter outreach; and get out the vote activities.

II. BACKGROUND

In the last few years the future stability of Bulgaria's political party system has been called into question. Erratic voter shifts, a decline of voter participation, and a general sense of public apathy are serious concerns in advance of the summer 2005 parliamentary elections. Political parties suffer from increasing internal conflict and disorganization. The severe fracturing among the center-right parties has contributed to increased public discontent with Bulgaria's political leadership. National political leadership has been unable to identify or effectively address issues of popular concern in campaigns and parties are evident largely in the media coverage of their infighting.

The June 2001 parliamentary elections exposed the instability of Bulgaria's political party system. The National Movement Simeon II (NMS) won half of the seats in parliament, even though it was established less than three months before the elections. The two parties that had dominated Bulgarian politics over the last decade – the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) – each won less than 20 percent in the elections and, combined, they received fewer votes than the NMS. The ability of a newly founded movement to sweep the elections and to defeat both of the major, established parties raises, at a minimum, serious questions about the future stability of Bulgaria's political party system.

The future cohesion and effectiveness of Bulgaria's three largest political parties is far from assured. Once in power, NMS experienced a steady decline in popular support. This decline was demonstrated by the defeat of President Peter Stoyanov, the NMS-supported candidate in the September 2001 presidential elections, and the low public support for the party in the autumn 2003 local elections. The failure to fulfill high public expectations was partially responsible for the decline. More importantly, however, the lack of organization, structures, or a significant

presence outside of Sofia hampers effective NMS governance. The lack of an organized national presence also crippled the NMS in the local elections. Disorganization within the party created uncertainty over whether or not the NMS would field candidates and how the party would run a local elections campaign. Ultimately, local coalitions in select communities did result in NMS-supported candidates winning seats on municipal councils. The lack of effective internal party structures and grassroots volunteers remain serious concerns for the party ahead of the summer 2005 parliamentary elections.

The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) is deeply divided and has experienced a series of debilitating fractures within the party. Relentless infighting and a very public split between the main branch of the UDF, under the leadership of Nadezhda Mihailova, and the supporters of former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov further eroded public support for the UDF. Although the party was able to enter into a select number of local coalitions before the second round of the local elections, the leadership of the UDF has stubbornly refused to discuss any coalition agreement before the parliamentary elections. The increasing distance between the national leadership and the party rank and file exacerbates the internal divisions. Rather than involve party members elected to local office; the UDF leadership has limited their input into party policies and distanced itself further from voters.

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) is divided between a reformist, modern social democratic leadership and a large faction of traditional socialist members. That division has contributed to the BSP's inability to expand beyond its limited base of support. Although the BSP won the plurality of votes cast in the first round of the autumn 2003 local elections, it is clear that a majority of Bulgarians still do not view the BSP as a viable, reformed political option, and are seeking alternatives. The BSP performed well in most council races, but has not substantially increased its share of public support. In terms of actual votes, the BSP remained more or less stable, earning essentially the same number of votes that it did in the 2001 parliamentary elections. Politics in a stable multi-party democracy is a battle over the political center, and local election results demonstrated the BSP's lack of appeal to the mainstream Bulgarian electorate.

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), the small party representing the Bulgarian Turks, emerged from the 2001 elections in a much stronger position. As a coalition partner of the NMS, the MRF expanded both its representation in parliament and ministries, and developed more of a voice in national policy making. The MRF continues to maintain an enviable position for a smaller party. Its seats in parliament make it an essential coalition partner for any ruling party. Its ethnic-centered political position enables it to enter into coalitions with any and all of Bulgaria's larger political parties and most likely ensures that it will pass the minimum threshold for seats in parliament.

The development of Bulgaria's political party system, in summary, has suffered serious setbacks and face further problems ahead of the parliamentary elections. The political system is now dominated by a personality-centered movement with little programmatic identity. The June 2001 elections dealt a severe and potentially crippling blow to the two political parties that had led the country's progress toward a programmatically and organizationally based party system. The parties are increasingly reverting to ideological debates rather than addressing issues of direct concern to voters. Progress toward organizationally strong and issue-based parties has halted,

for the time being at least, and may give way to further personality-driven movements, splinter parties, and periods of unpredictably shifting and opportunistic political alliances. Under such conditions, the task of governing the country may become increasingly difficult.

IRI is working with the main political parties in Bulgaria to develop campaign plans and messages for the parliamentary elections that reflect the concerns of the voters. While the work is focused on the four political parties currently represented in parliament, IRI is also cooperating with other political parties that receive at least 3-5 percent support in public opinion polls.

In advance of the summer 2005 parliamentary elections, IRI is focusing its attention in key areas. These areas include issue identification and message crafting, and campaign training for the main political parties. The training will assist parties in mobilizing their strengthened party structures for the election campaigns and reaching out to voters with campaigns focused on issues of local concern.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Due to administrative delays, the grant funds were not obligated to IRI until February of this year. IRI made significant progress in establishing the program in Bulgaria. IRI's activities this quarter were a combination of administrative procedures to set up a new office in Sofia, the expeditious fielding and presentation of the first poll, and dissemination of training materials to the main Bulgarian parties. During this reporting period, IRI regularly consulted with the US Embassy and USAID before and during the office set up procedures. IRI Washington staff David Lintgen traveled to Bulgaria in February to set up IRI's office, reactivate IRI's bank account, and hire local program assistant, Milena Nedeva.

IRI's Washington office, in coordination with the newly set up Sofia office, solicited bids for the extensive polling project that began in March 2005. This program will involve three national polls and intensive political party training for the main Bulgarian parties. Market Links has been contracted to conduct the national polls. IRI immediately fielded the first poll in March and plans to field additional surveys in April and May.

IRI has also contracted with the American pollster who will be responsible for the design and analysis of IRI's polls in Bulgaria. David Williams, of Williams and Associates, has extensive experience in Eastern Europe in general and Bulgaria in particular. He has worked on IRI polling projects in BiH, Serbia, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, and Macedonia. He also worked extensively with IRI's polling project in Bulgaria both before and after the June 2001 parliamentary elections.

IRI also contracted with the party consultant, Martin Minns, who will work with the local program assistant Milena Nedeva, as well as the US based polling consultant David Williams to implement the IRI program in Bulgaria. Mr. Minns is a British political consultant with extensive international experience, including prior assignments in Bulgaria. Mr. Minns traveled to Sofia in February to join David Lintgen in setting up the office and getting the program running.

First national poll

Since a major component of IRI's program in Bulgaria is a comprehensive public opinion polling project, IRI fielded and presented the first of three polls scheduled to be implemented before the June elections. IRI's polls will aim at exploring public attitudes towards individual parties and key campaign issues.

IRI, in conjunction with the private polling agency, Market Links, and the US based pollster David Williams designed and fielded the first national poll from March 10 to 18, 2005. On the March poll, IRI allowed each of the major political parties insert several questions to the questionnaire. IRI presented the poll to USAID and the US Embassy. IRI also presented the polling results to all of the major political parties so that they will be able to test various campaign messages and track the public opinion of those messages. IRI's polling consultant David Williams and party consultant Martin Minns traveled to Sofia in March to present the poll results to the political parties, USAID and the US Embassy, as well as to start the political party training.

The survey results of 1,080 adults were compared to two previous surveys in January and March of 2004. The March 2005 survey found that most Bulgarians are roughly split in their opinion whether their country is going to the right direction or not. Over 35% believe that the country is going in the wrong direction, an increase from the March 2004 survey where a little over 28% believed the country was going in the wrong direction. Meanwhile, 28.4% believe that the country is going in the right direction. This is a steady increase over the March 2004 poll and a slight increase over the January 2004 poll.

The number of respondents who feel that they are economically worse off than they were two years ago dipped to a significantly low 45.6%. Although 47% did not expect their economic situations to improve in the coming year, the number of people who expect their economic situation to be worse dropped from 24% in March 2004 to 17.4% in March 2005.

The survey found that the opinion toward the government remained negative overall. Fifty percent of those polled do not think the current government deserves reelection, a slight improvement from 60% in March 2004. Despite the improved results, frustration with the current government continues to be pervasive. None of the political parties received a positive public opinion differential. BSP's rating slightly deteriorated (-1% differential) over its performance in the March 2005 poll compared to the March 2004 poll. The public opinion for the UDF stayed at a significant negative of 63%. The NMS continued to improve, moving from a 60% negative opinion of March last year, to a 50% negative this year. The question that best reflects how people in general feel about the political party options before them is "Do you think that there is a party which addresses the problems you care about. If so, which party is it?" Over the past three polls the number of people responding "there is no such party" has slightly decreased, but the percentage remains significantly high at 57%.

IRI also included questions to check public opinion of the national leaders. Among center-right politicians, Sofia Mayor and UFD Chairman Sofianski suffered a significant decrease in positive opinion among people polled about whom they would like to see as prime minister. The

decrease was from 25% last year to a little over 11% this year. Current Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha showed a positive differential of 6.4 in public support and 17.6% of respondents would like to see him again as prime minister. UDF leader Nadezhda Mihailova had a very slight positive differential of .7 and only 8.6% of respondents would like her to be prime minister. Former Prime Minister Kostov trails far behind with a 4% public support for a second term as prime minister.

For complete information on these results, please see the attached PowerPoint presentation.

Meetings

During this reporting period, IRI had several meetings with government and political party officials, as well as with officials from USAID and the U.S. Embassy.

-On February 23, IRI staff and political consultant Martin Minns met with USAID officials to discuss the IRI program in Bulgaria and its phases, as well as receive a briefing on the most up-to-date political situation in the country. The participants in the meeting included: USAID Mission Director Debra McFarland, USAID Democracy & Local Governance Officer Gene Gibson, USAID Civil Society Advisor Diana Arnaudova, USAID Local Government Advisor Kiril Kiryakov, and USAID Program Officer Ivanka Tzankova.

-On February 24, IRI staff and political consultant Martin Minns met with representatives and campaign advisors of the UDF on the stage of the coalition negotiations, the issues that UDF thought were more pressing regarding the campaign, and plans for meetings after the IRI poll. Among the participants were Nadezhda Mihailova, Chair of UDF; Nicolai Mladenov, MP and UDF spokesperson; Jim Loftus and Ian Marquardt, UDF Campaign Advisors; and Yuli Pavlov, Director of the Center for Analyses and Marketing.

-On February 24, IRI also met with representatives of National Movement Simeon II (NMS), including Alida Rizova, Head of the International Department, Svetoslav Spassov, MP and Member of Political Council, and Darinka Stancheva, MP. The discussions focused on the NMS organizational campaign structure and IRI took the opportunity to present the IRI training and polling projects for the coming months.

-On February 25, IRI met with representatives of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), including Ekaterina Nickolova, Head of Campaign Headquarters, and BSP political advisors Vasil Ilchev, Yuri Aslanov and Ilia Bozhinov. IRI focused the discussions on presenting its program agenda, while the BSP officials expressed their interest to receive training and to see the results of the upcoming IRI national poll.

After IRI fielded and analyzed the first national poll in March, its staff, Mr. Minns and Mr. Williams started another series of meetings with the purpose of sharing the information and discussing the polling results with the political party officials, USAID and the U.S. Embassy.

IV. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Result 1 Major political parties run effective campaigns focused on issues of concern.

Indicators

- A. Written campaign plans for national and party branch offices are designed and implemented.
- B. IRI-trained candidates and campaign managers address issues of concern in their election campaign.

The focus of IRI's initial program activities during this quarter was directly linked to Result 1 and its indicators. Significant progress was made to make the major political parties aware of the political atmosphere in which they are operating. The first poll that IRI fielded in March was helpful in this particular sense. Where the public stands on issues such as their families' economic future, the state of unemployment and whom they trust or do not trust to put in charge of the country in order to improve their life, were among the major issues that all government officials and political party leaders found more relevant.

These issues will most likely affect the mindset of the political party leaders and their campaign advisors as they get close to election day. Obviously, the upcoming polls will be the best tracking device to see the impact of the campaign strategies based on these initial results.

IRI also translated and distributed three training manuals on e-campaigning, campaign organization and election organization adjusted to the needs of the Bulgarian political parties. The impact of these materials on the parties' campaigns will need more time to be evaluated.

Result 2 Major parties utilize public opinion polling to lead issue-oriented campaigns.

Indicators

- A. Parties develop campaign messages that reflect the issues identified in public opinion polling.
- B. Party activists are trained on the uses of public opinion research and parties undertake such efforts on their own.
- C. IRI-trained candidates and campaign managers address issues of concern in their election campaign.

The implementation of national poll relates to Result 2, as well. After the issues became known through the poll, this parties think through campaign plans and prepared IRI to train candidates in issue-based campaigns.

Result 3 Major parties create and use voter identification models to run effective campaigns.

Indicators

- A. Campaigns of the major political parties develop strategies for direct voter contact.
- B. Political parties implement voter outreach programs and maintain records of voters contacted.

Nothing to report

V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

IRI plans to step up program activities in the second quarter. The preparations for the second national poll were already underway during this reporting period. IRI plans to fly both the political consultant and the US based pollster to Bulgaria for training projects, the fielding of the second poll and the eventual presentations of the poll. IRI plans to implement a series of regional campaign training sessions with the focus on local campaign organization, specifically on how to identify local issues and develop campaign messages. IRI will continue to work with national campaign organizations to assist them in developing press and broadcast media strategies. The political party consultant will spend substantial amount of time in the field to provide advice on the content and production of party media advertising and give offer in-depth consultations and advice on voter identification issues.

ATTACHMENTS

March national poll



National Representative Survey

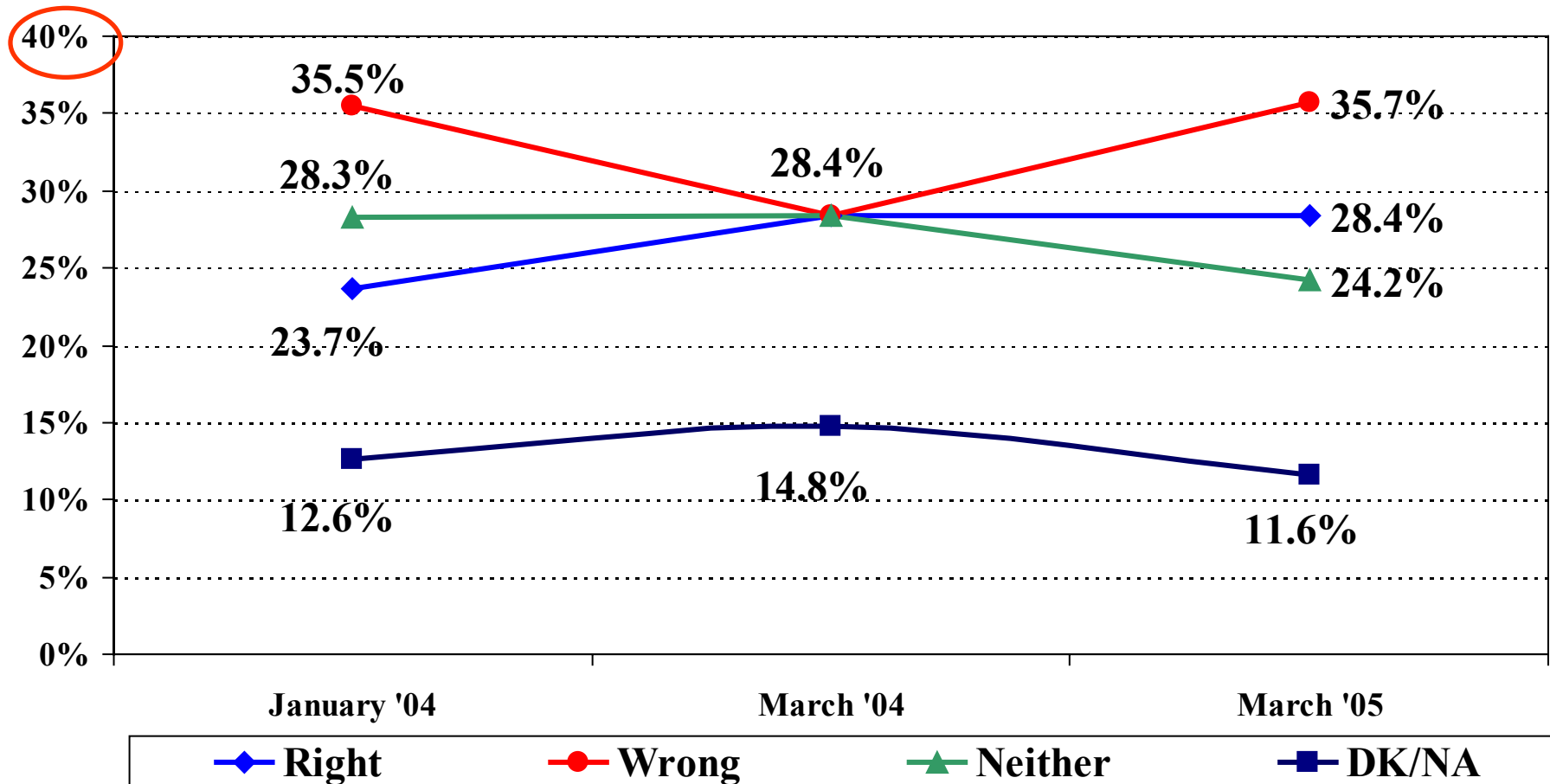
Market Links

**January, March 2004
March 2005**

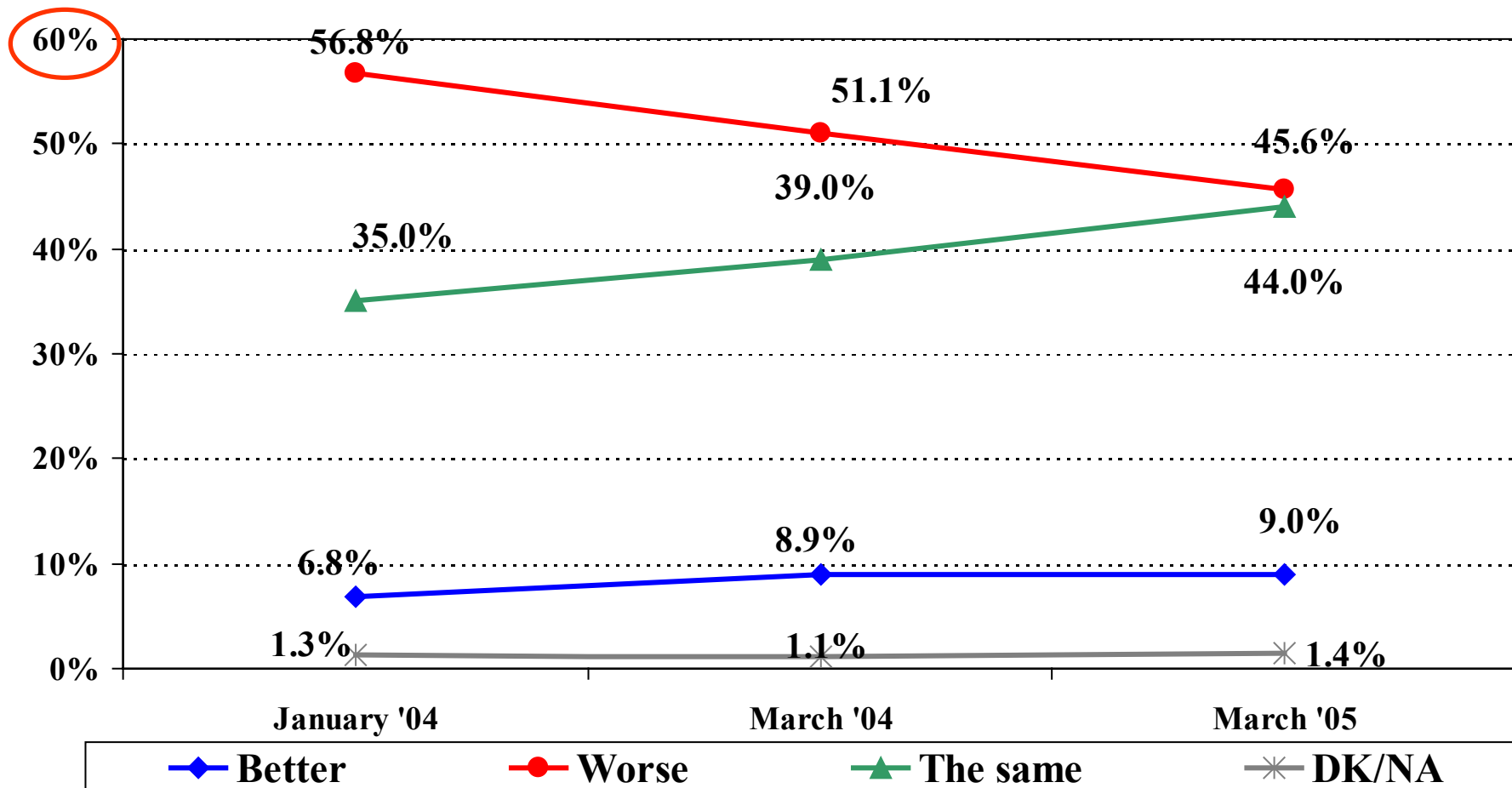
Survey Specifications

	January 2004	March 2004	March 2005
<i>Method of registration</i>	Face-to-face interview in home		
<i>Sample design</i>	Representative clustered sample; identification of respondents according to addresses from voting lists		
<i>Achieved sample</i>	1347	1347	1080
<i>Fieldwork conducted</i>	17-24 th , 2004	25-2 th , 2004	7-13 th , 2005
<i>Studied universe</i>	Bulgarian population aged 18+ (6 450 000)		
<i>Representativeness of data</i>	1 percent of the data corresponds to 64 000 people when calculated for the whole sample		

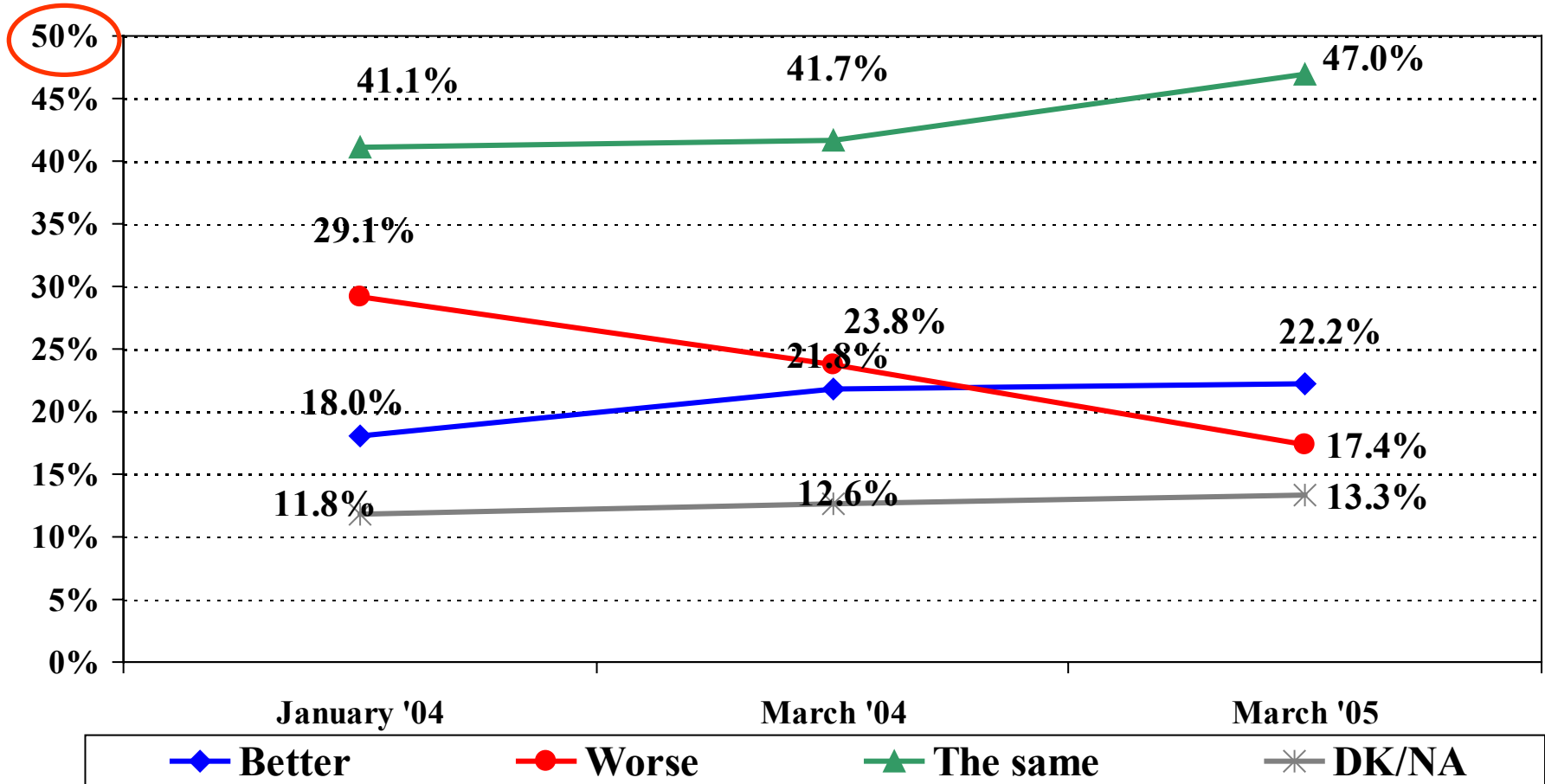
*Overall is Bulgaria headed in the right
or wrong direction?*



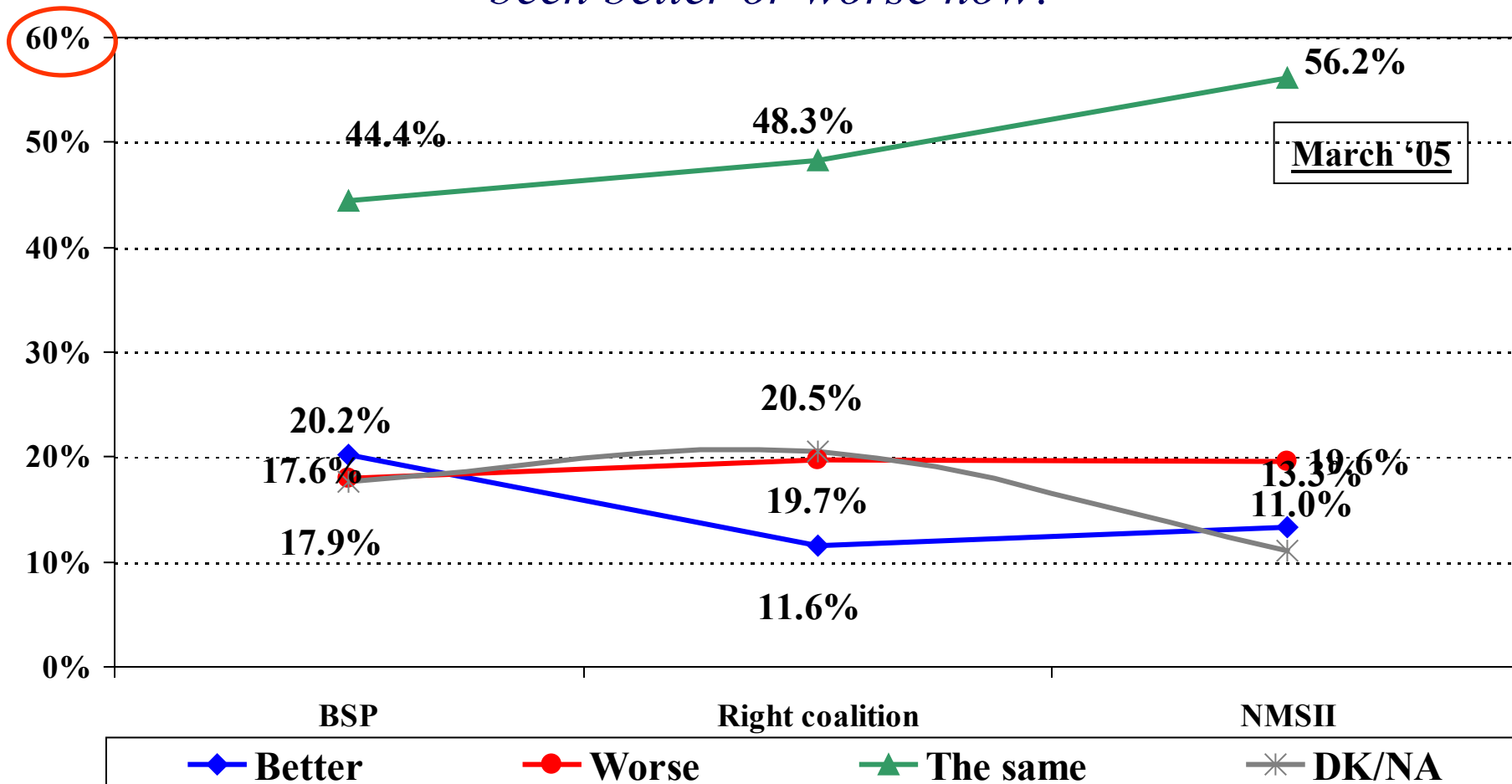
*How is your family's economic situation compared
with two years ago?*



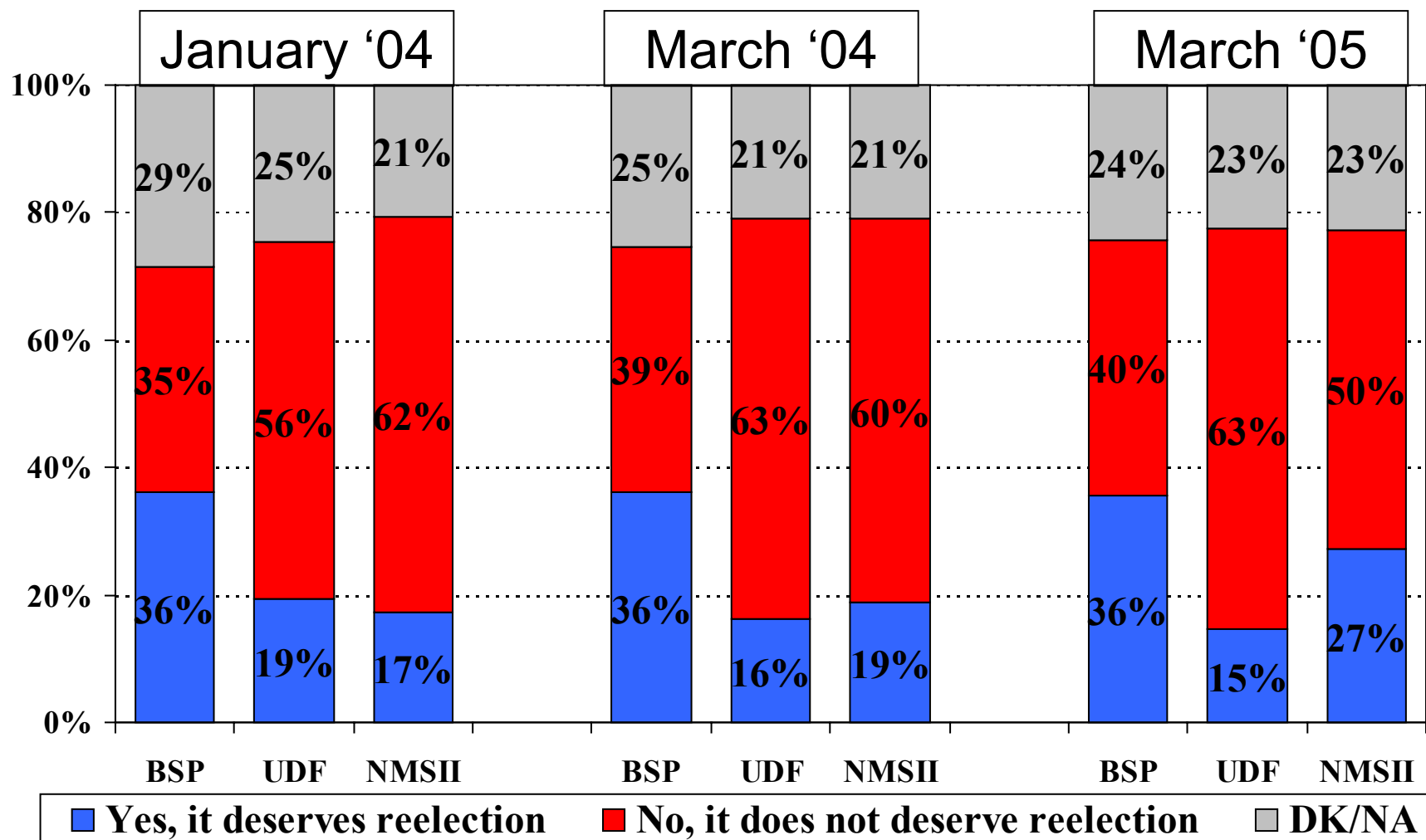
How do you expect you and your family's economic situation to be one year from now?



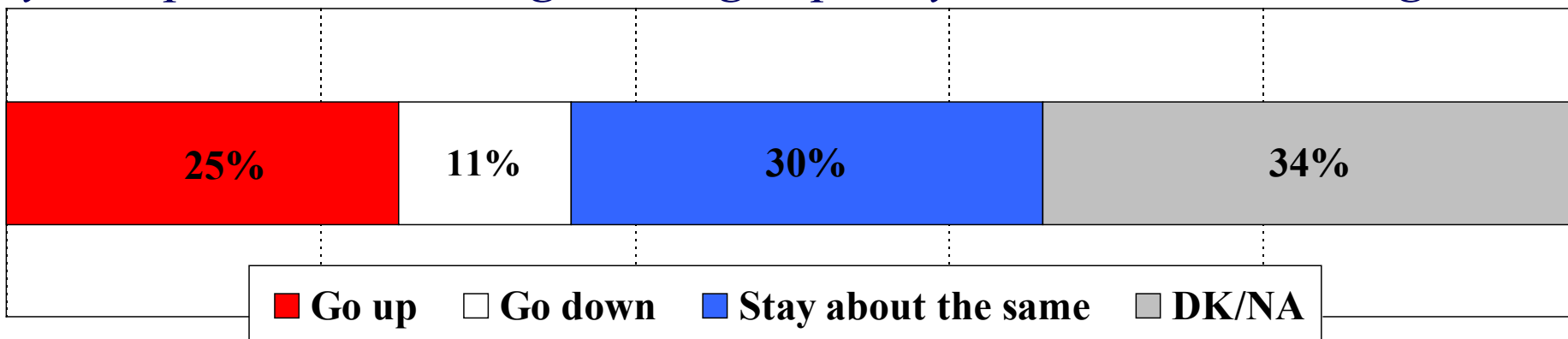
*In your opinion if **BSP / Right coalition / NMSII** had won the parliamentary elections would your family's economic situation have been better or worse now?*



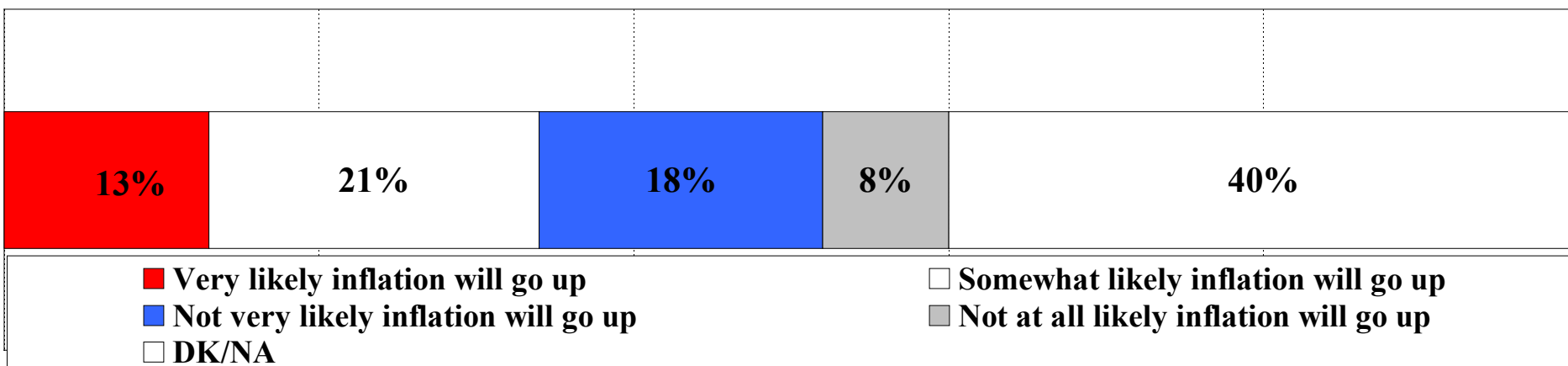
*Do you think that the **BSP / UDF / NMSII** deserves a second chance to govern the country?*



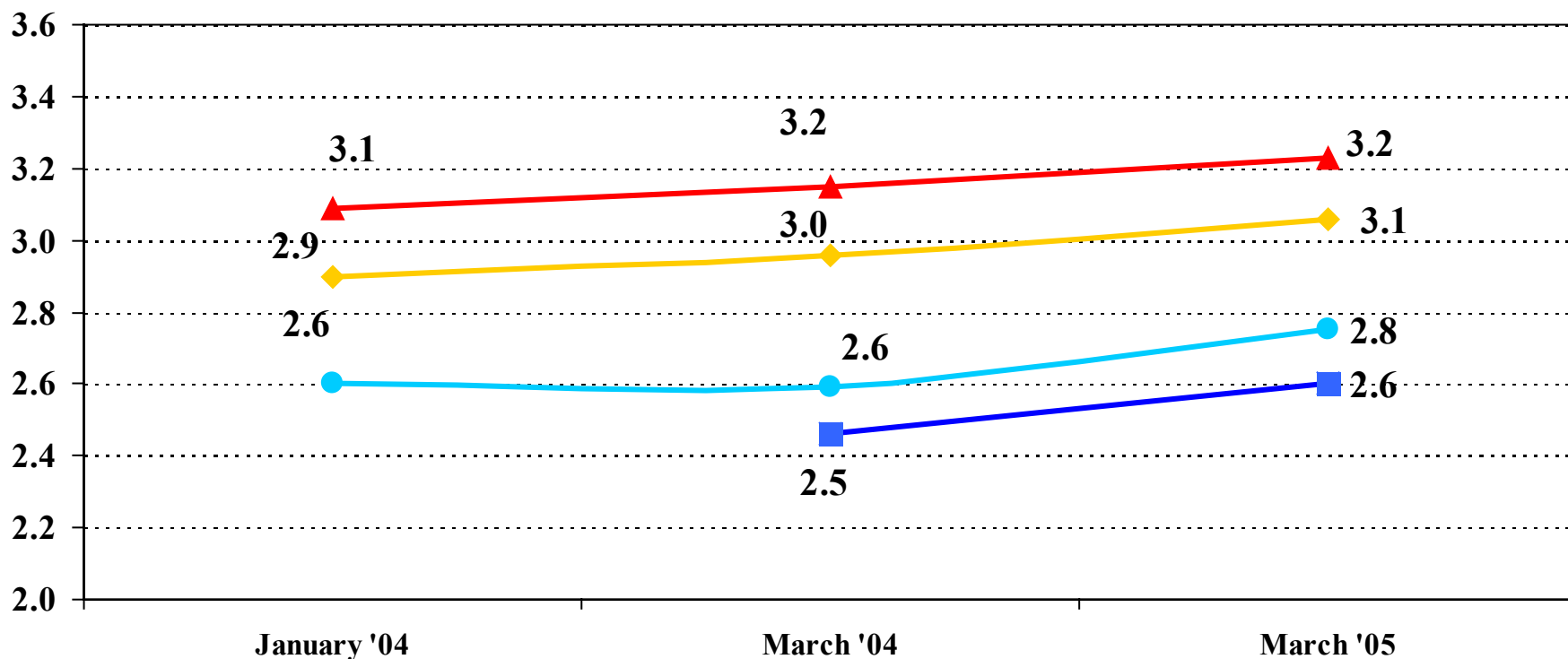
In your opinion, if NMSII wins the upcoming parliamentary elections, do you expect taxes in Bulgaria to go up, stay above the same, or go down?



In your opinion, if BSP wins the upcoming parliamentary elections, how likely do you think it is that inflation will go up or no?



*What grade would you give for the overall performance of:
/Use the 2-6 scale/*



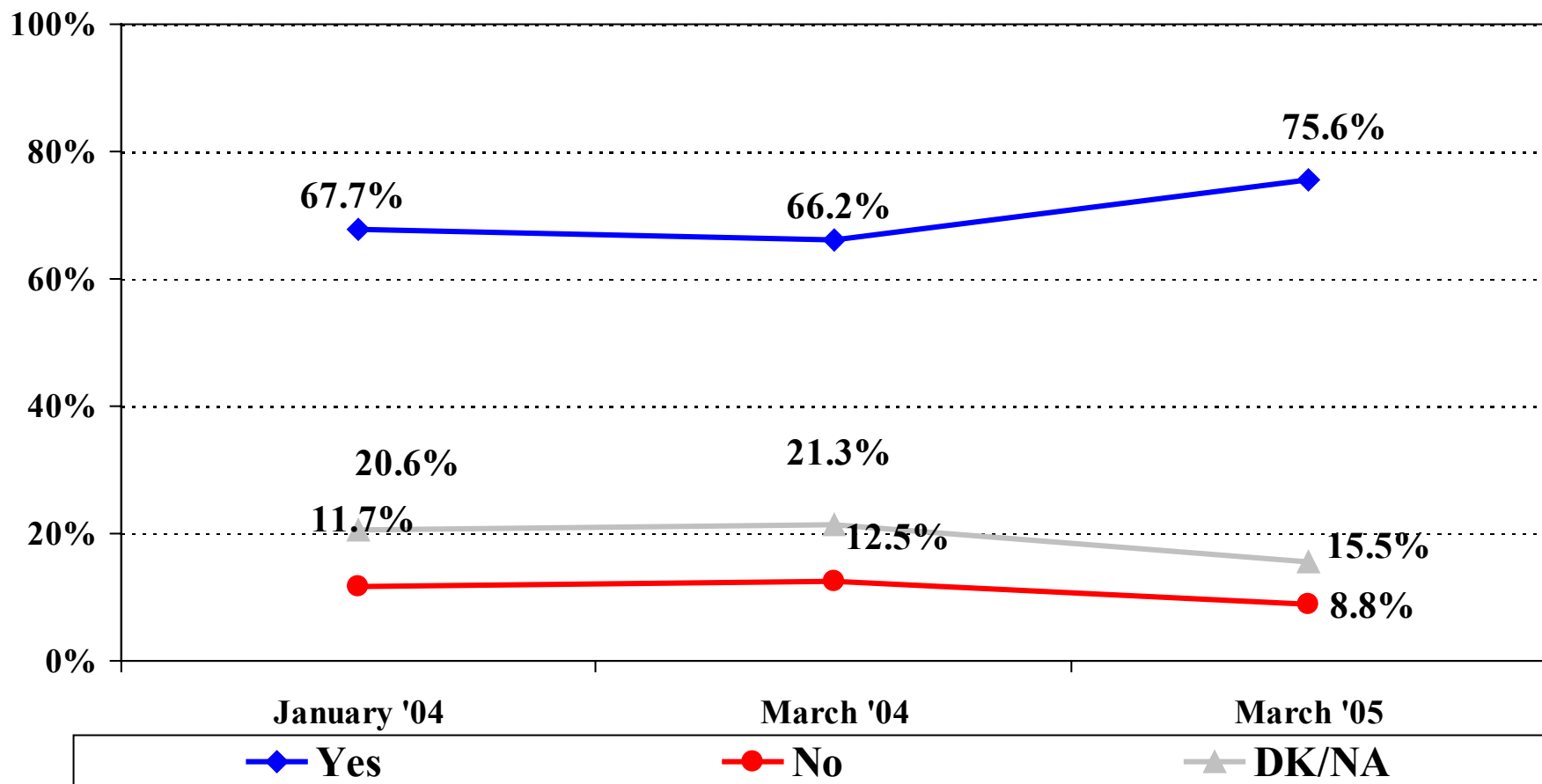
◆ The current government

▲ BSP as an opposition

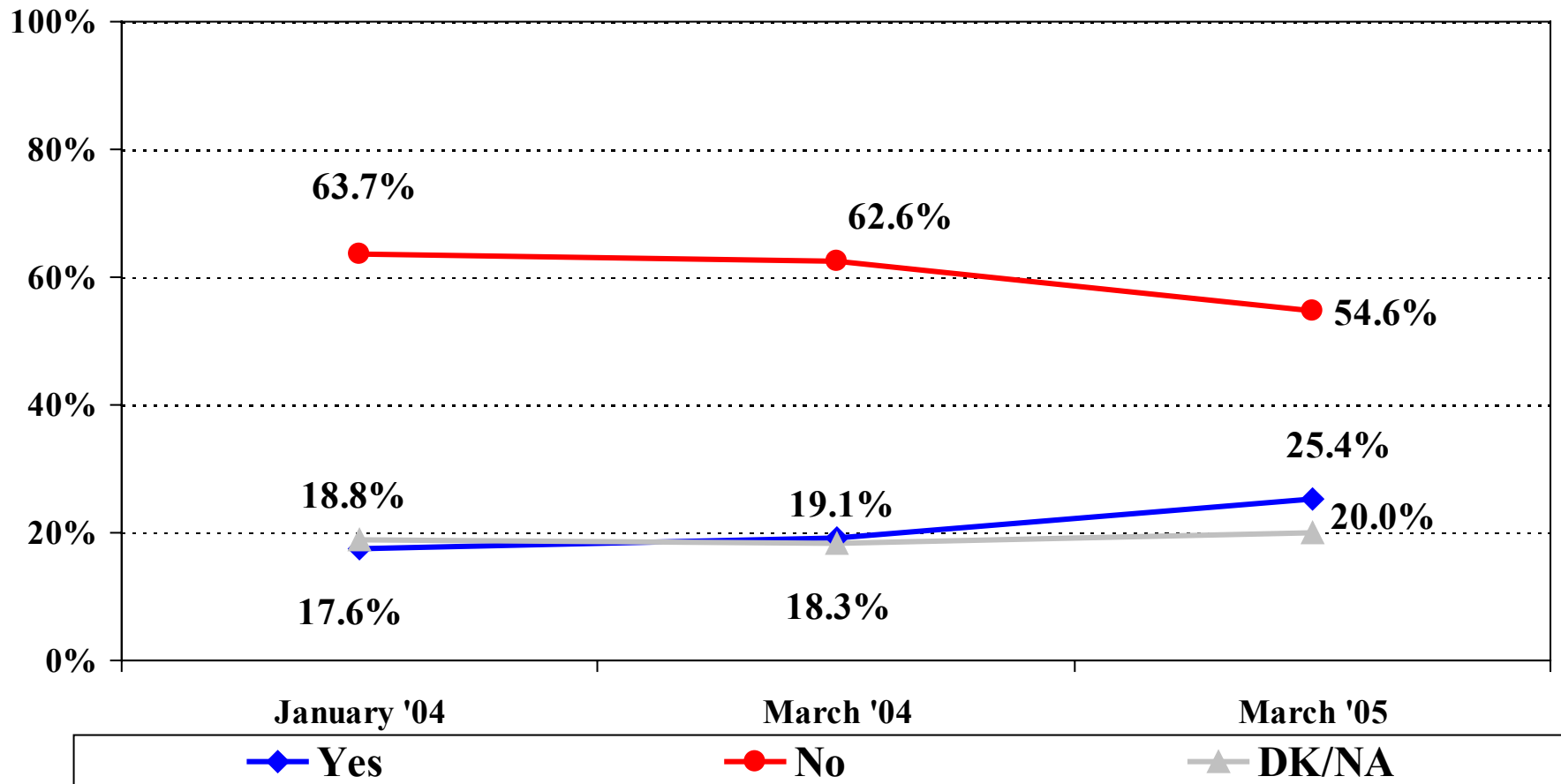
● UDF as an opposition

■ DSB as an opposition

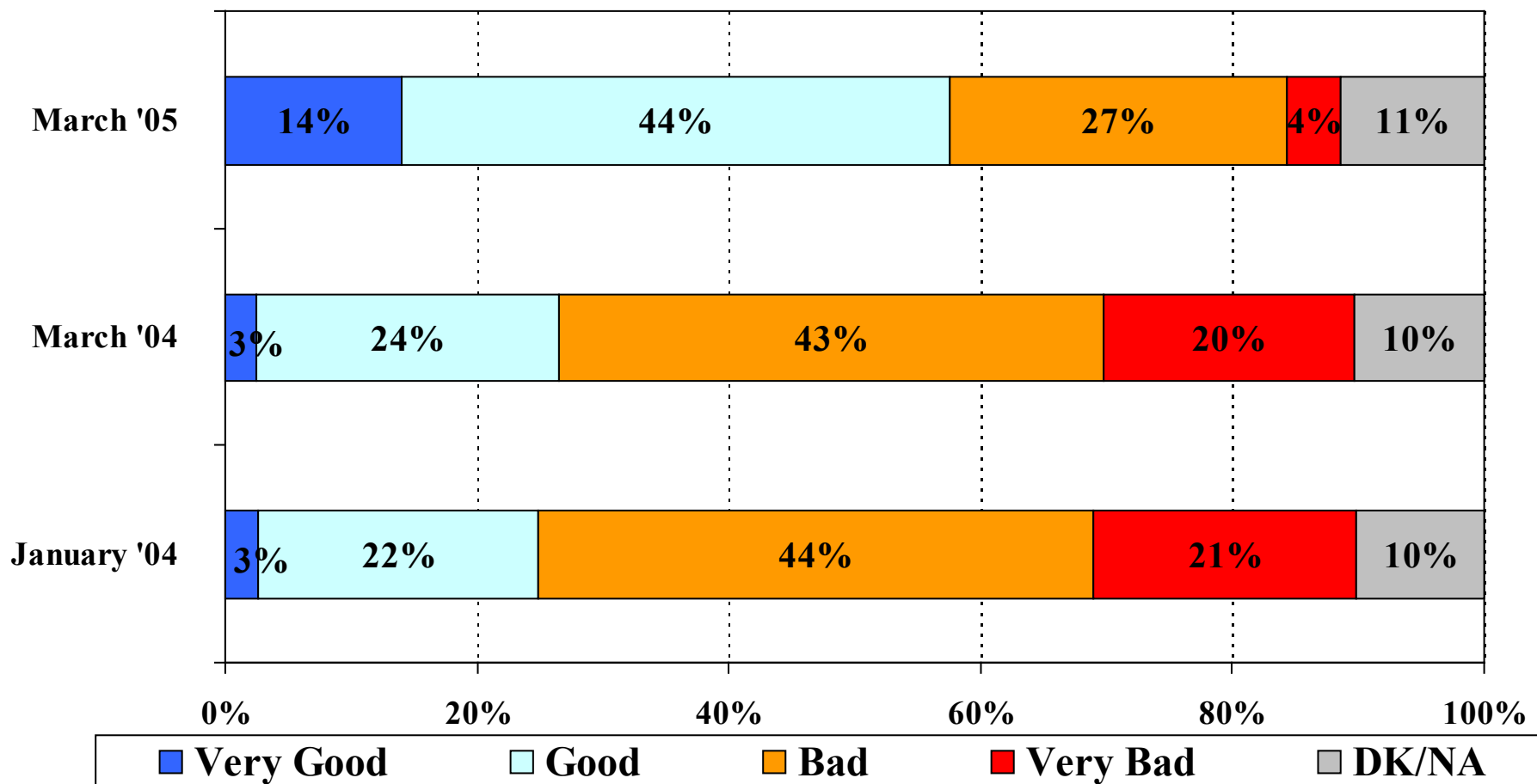
When you think of President Parvanov has he done his job well enough to deserve re-election?



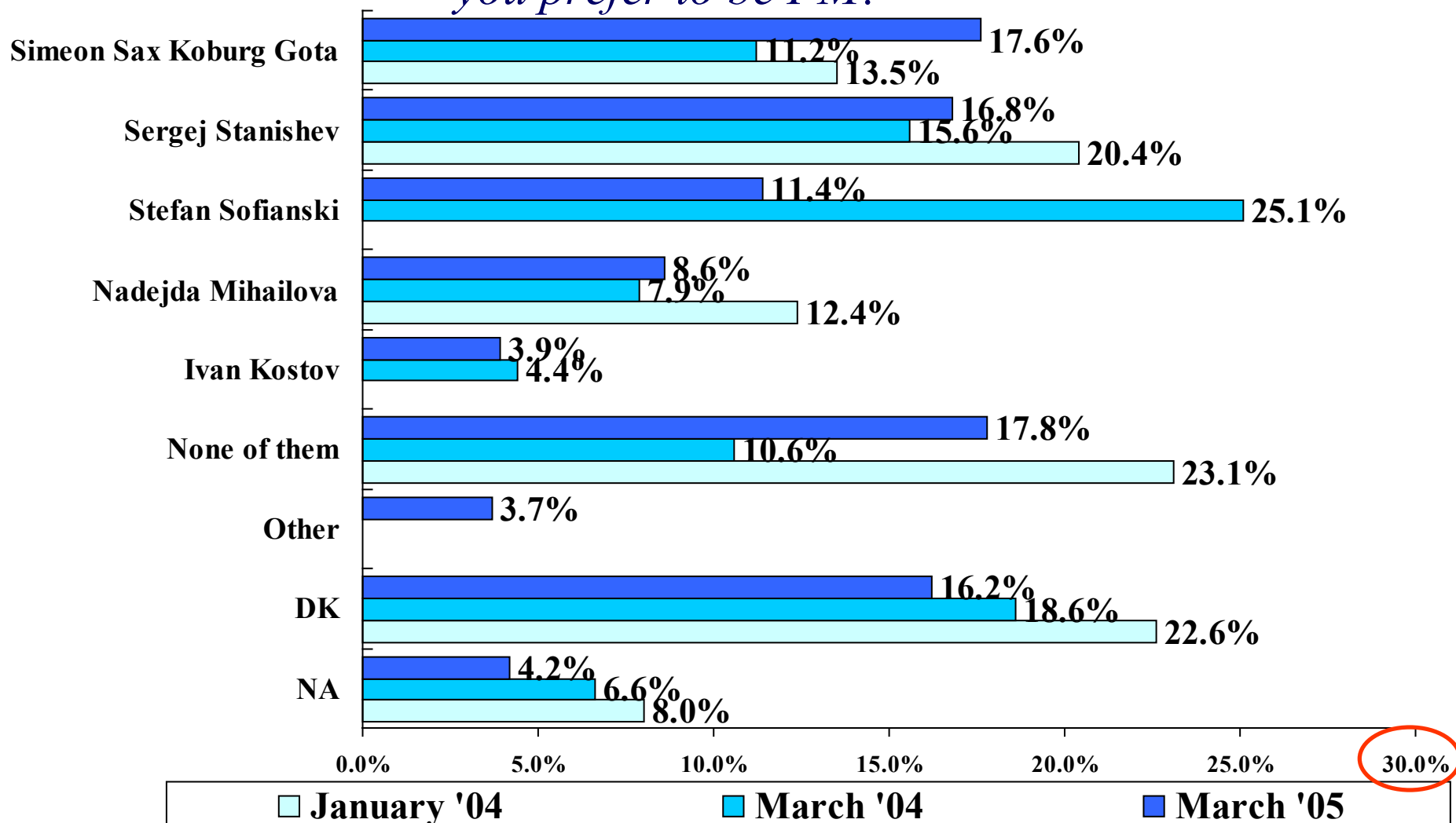
And what about the current government of prime Minister Simeon Sax Koburg Gota, does it deserve re-election?



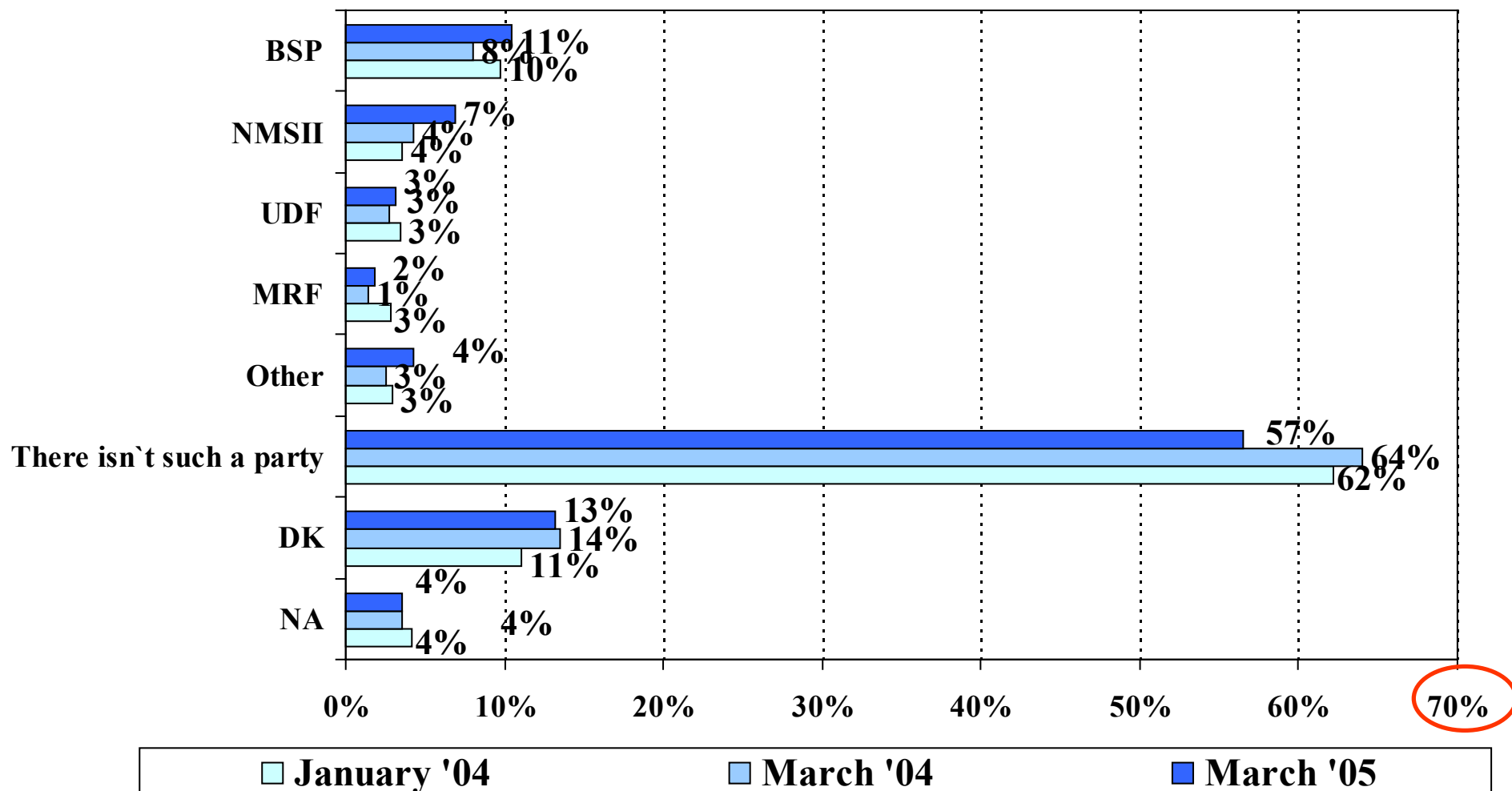
How good of a job you think Simeon Sax Koburg Gota do as a Prime Minister?



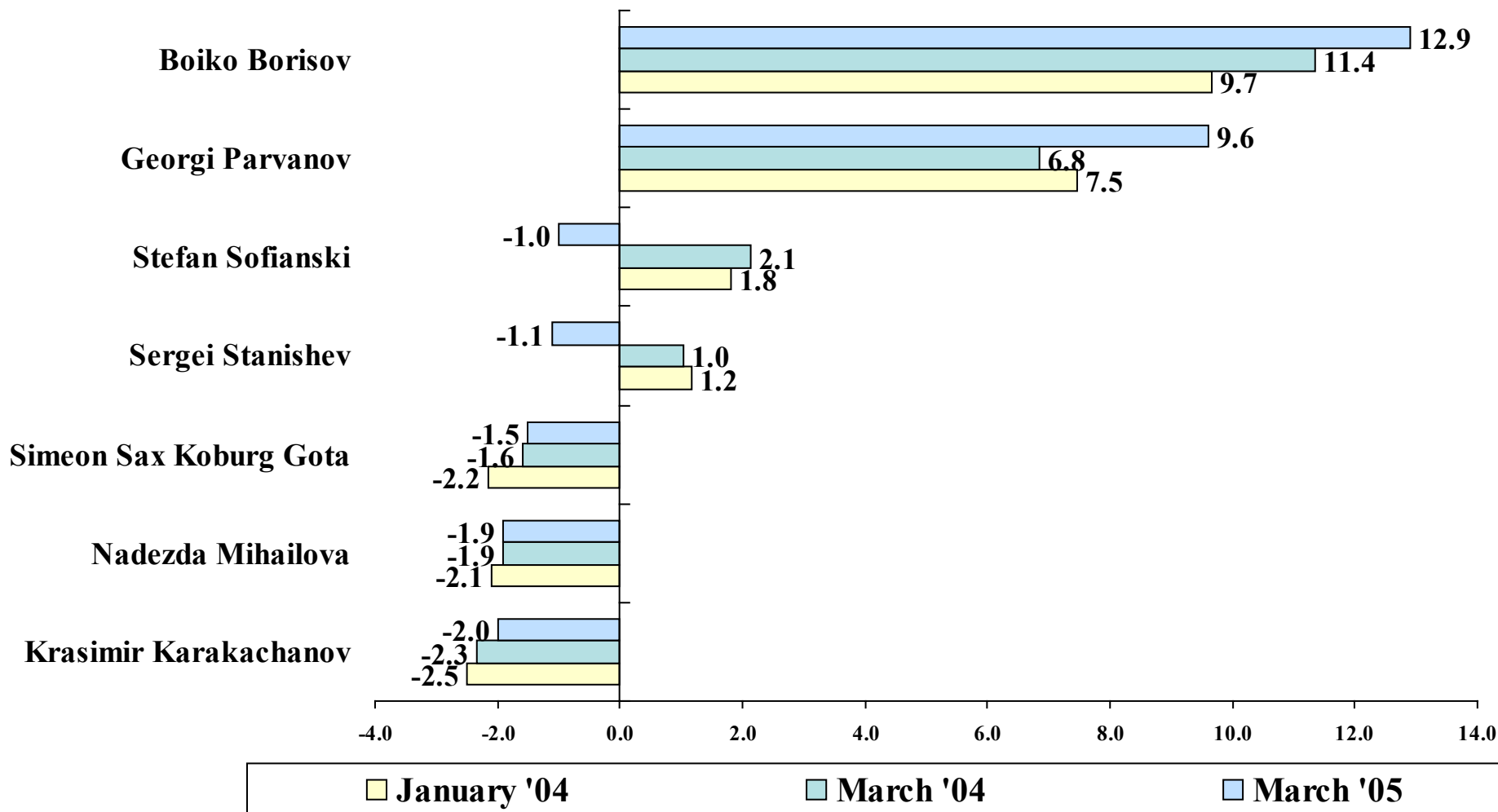
Regardless of the party you support, which of the following would you prefer to be PM?



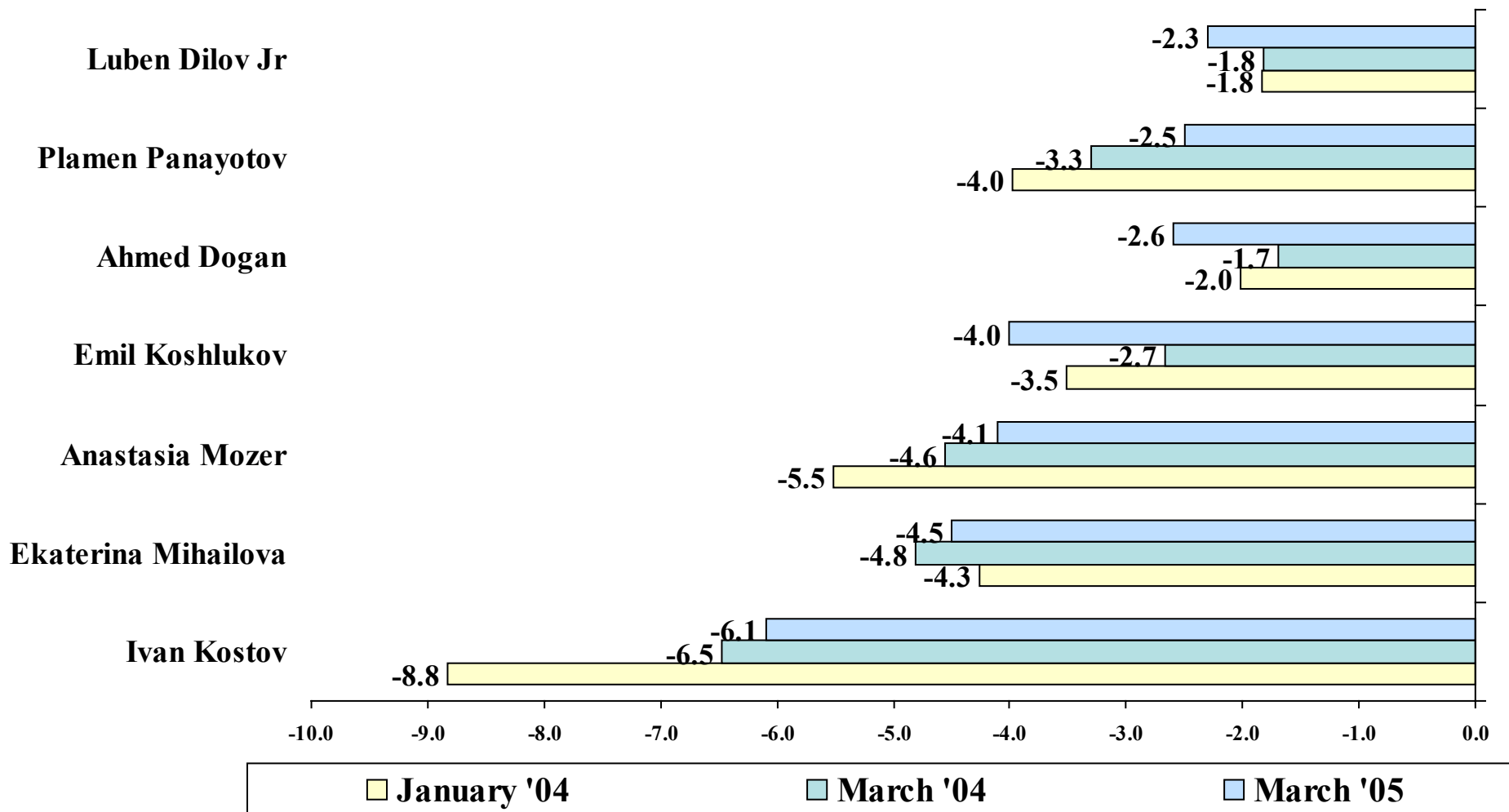
Do you think that there is a party which addresses the problems you care about. If so, which party is it?



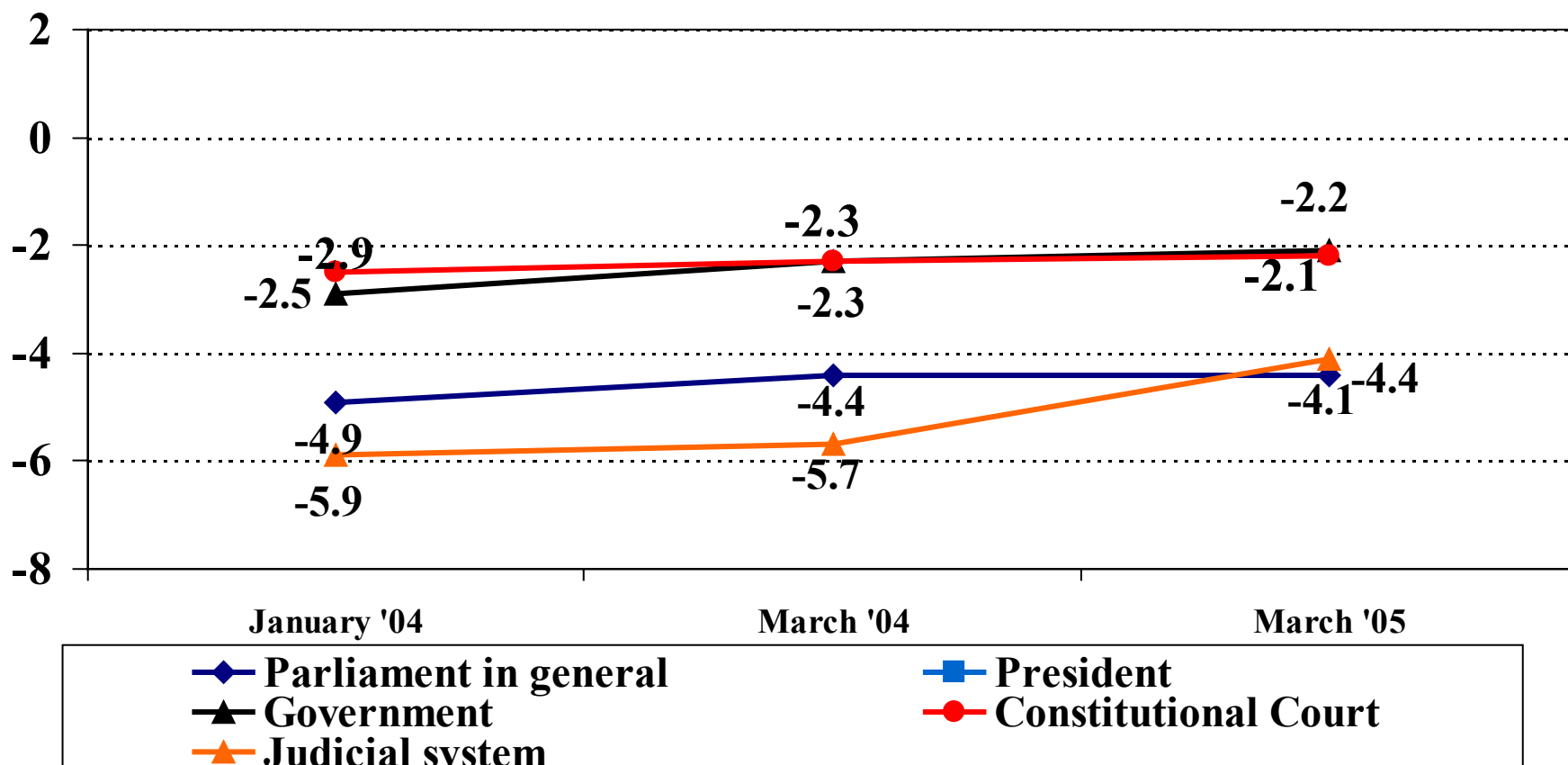
*Now I am going to read you a list of some prominent people in public life.
Tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of him/her?*



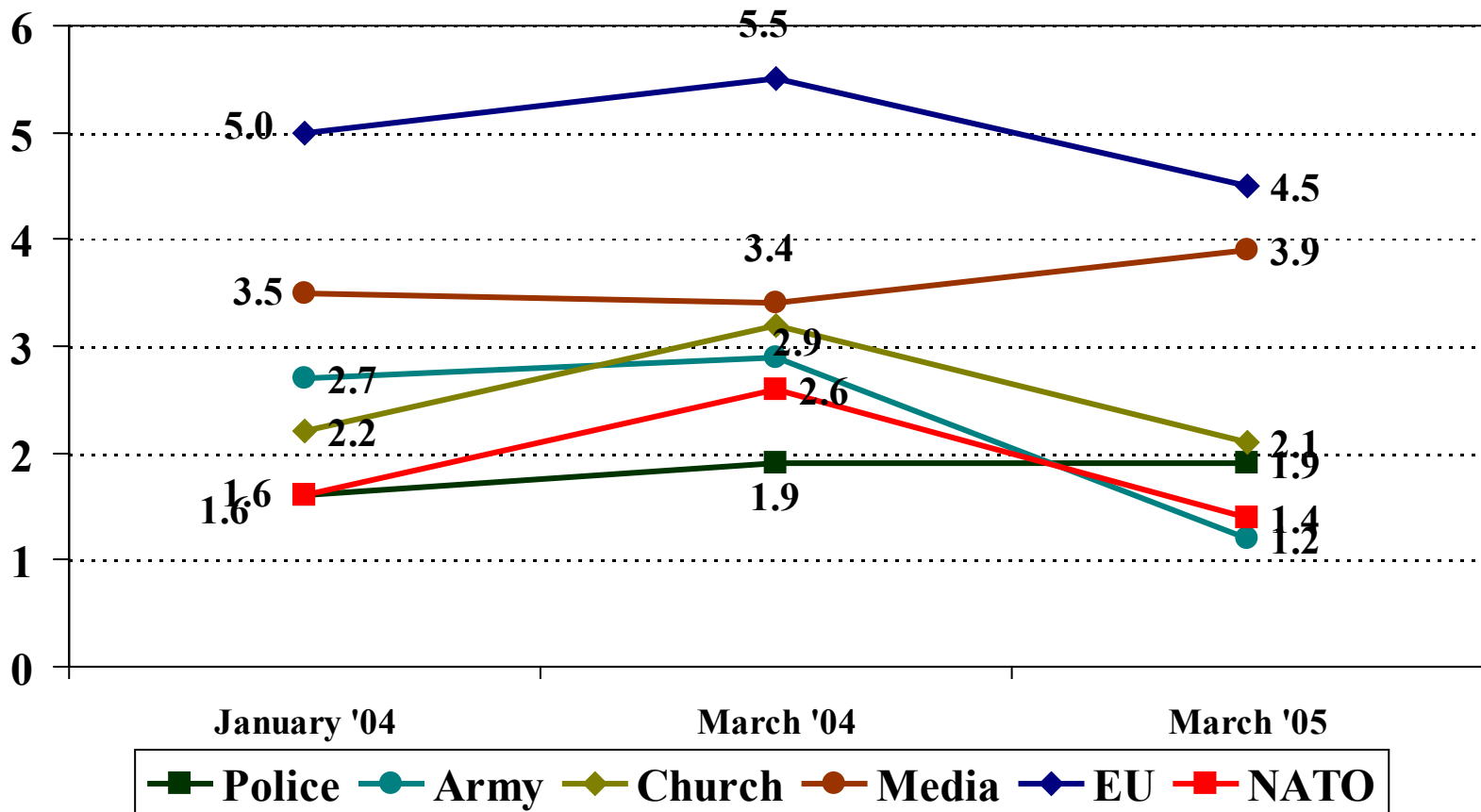
*Now I am going to read you a list of some prominent people in public life.
Tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of him/her?*



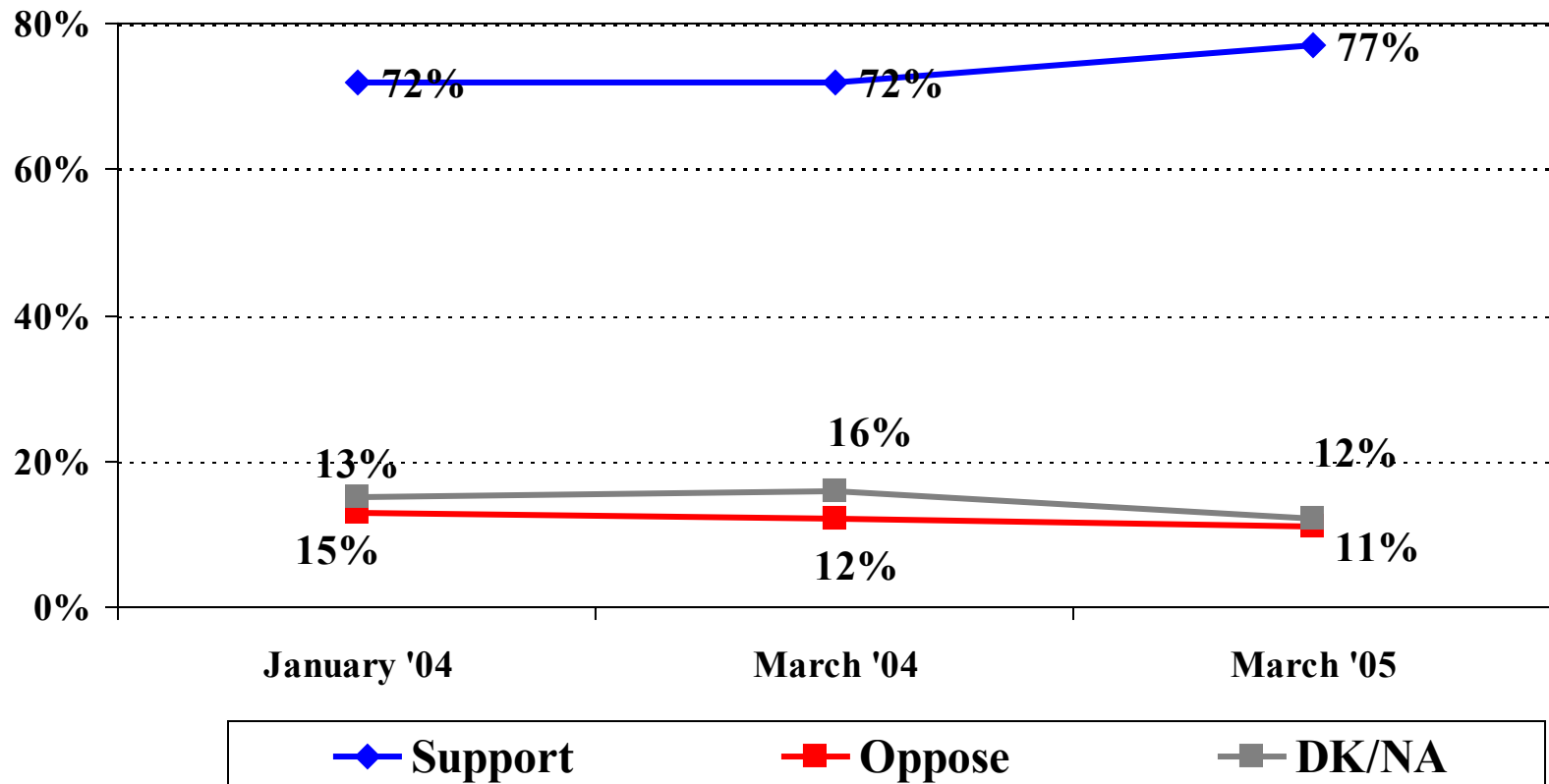
*Now I am going to read you a list of institutions. For each please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them
(government)*



*Now I am going to read you a list of institutions. For each please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them
(non government)*

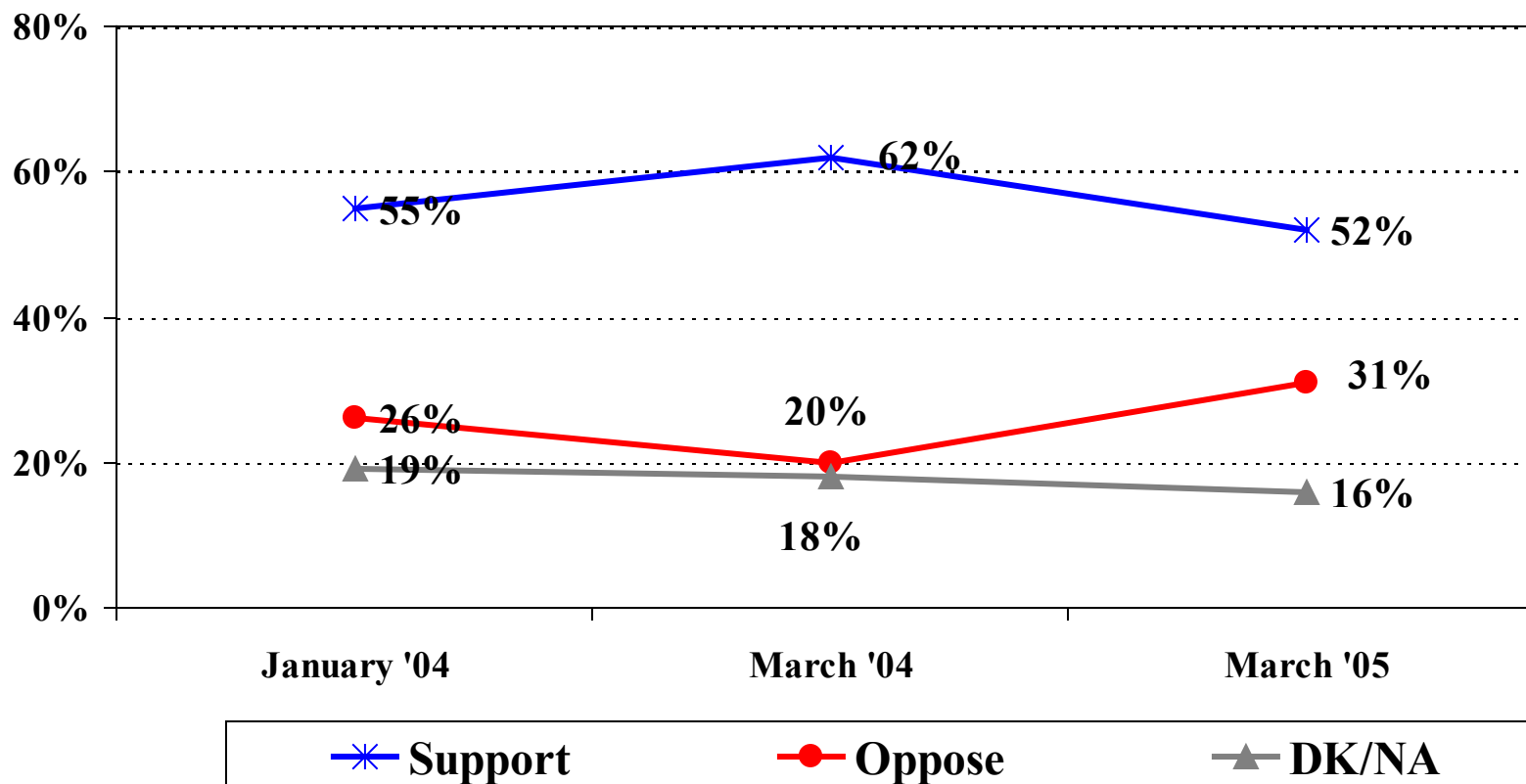


*To what extent do you support or oppose Bulgaria's membership in
these organizations?*
European Union

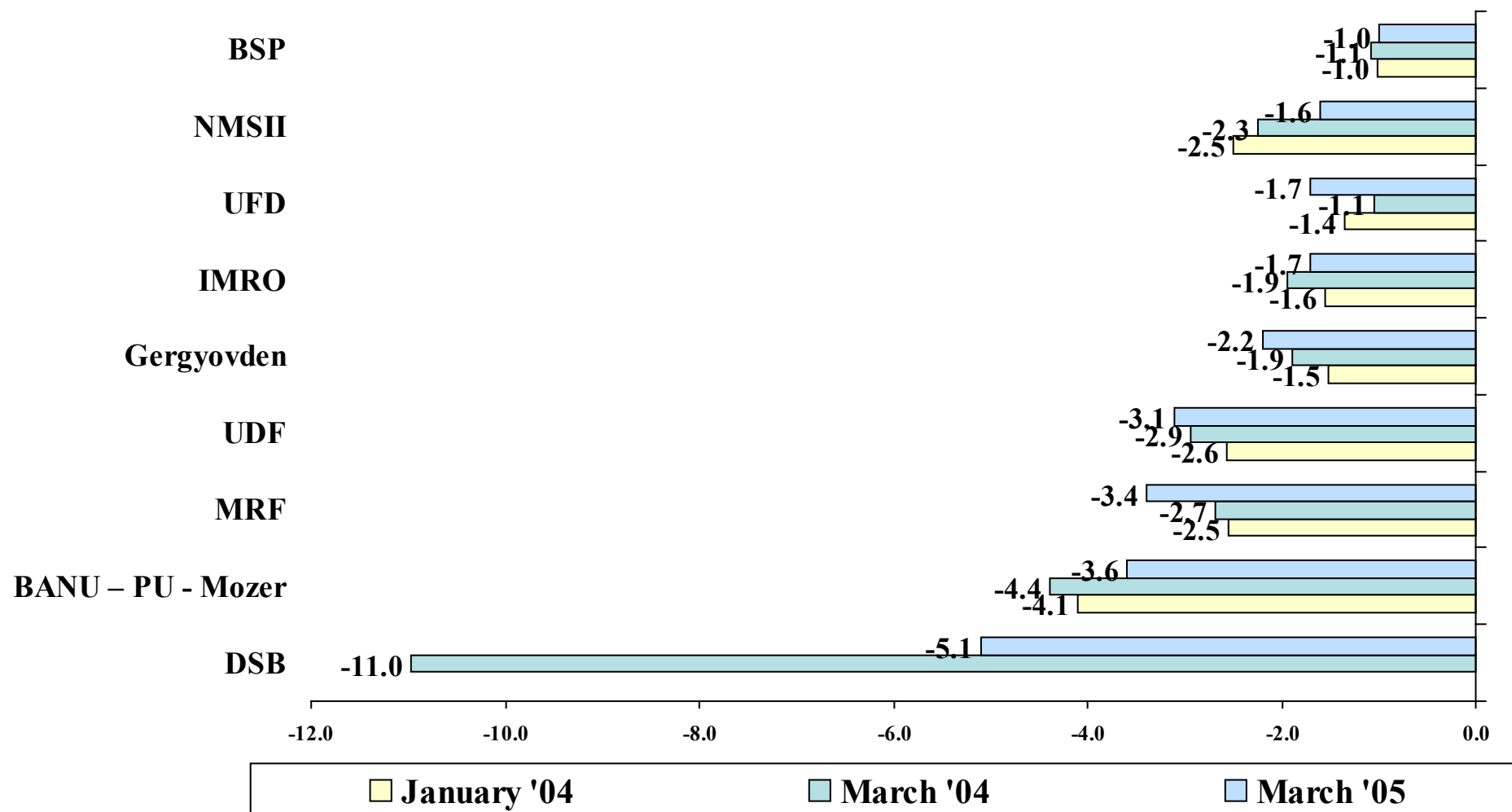


To what extent do you support or oppose Bulgaria's membership in these organizations?

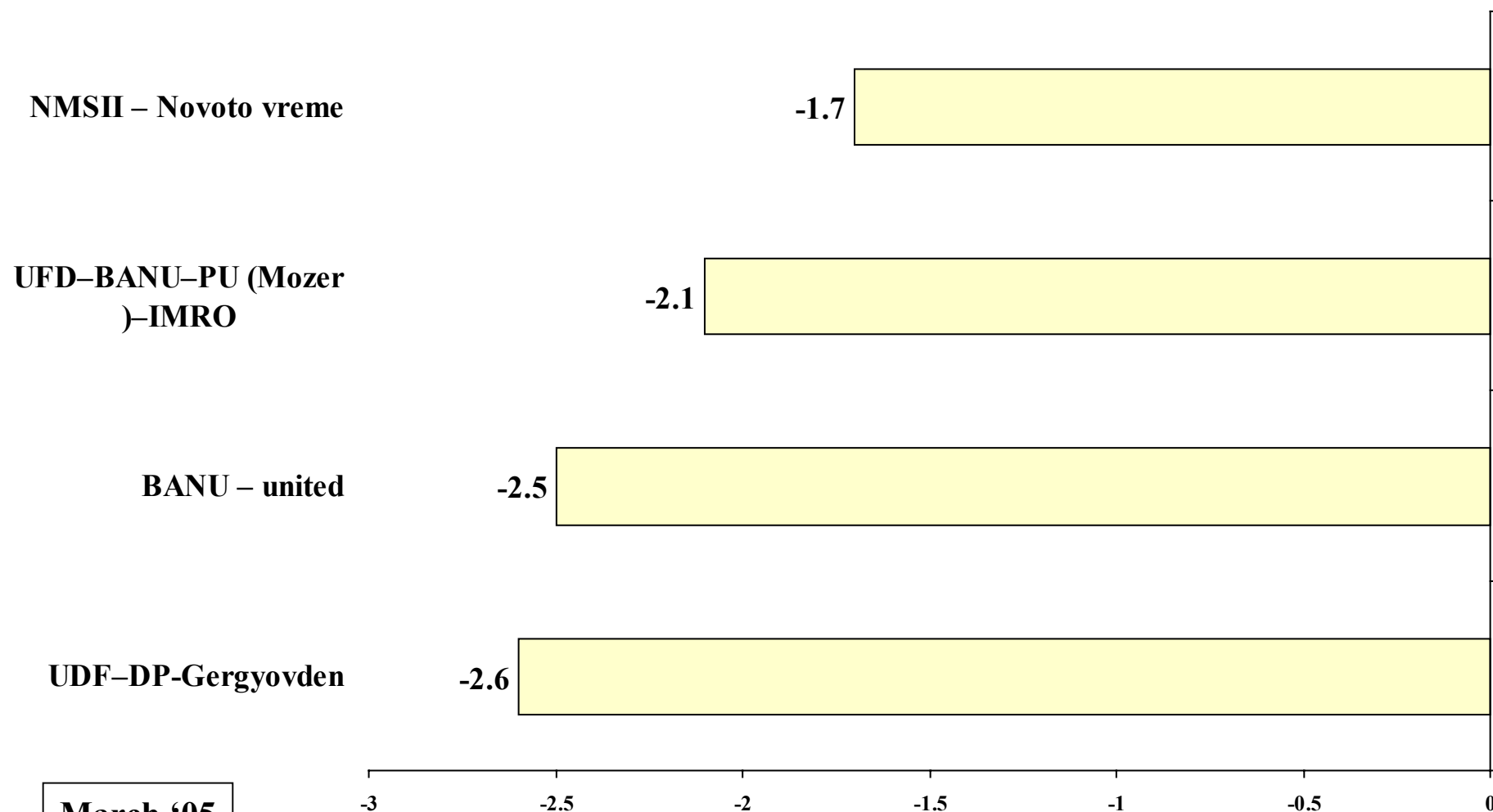
NATO



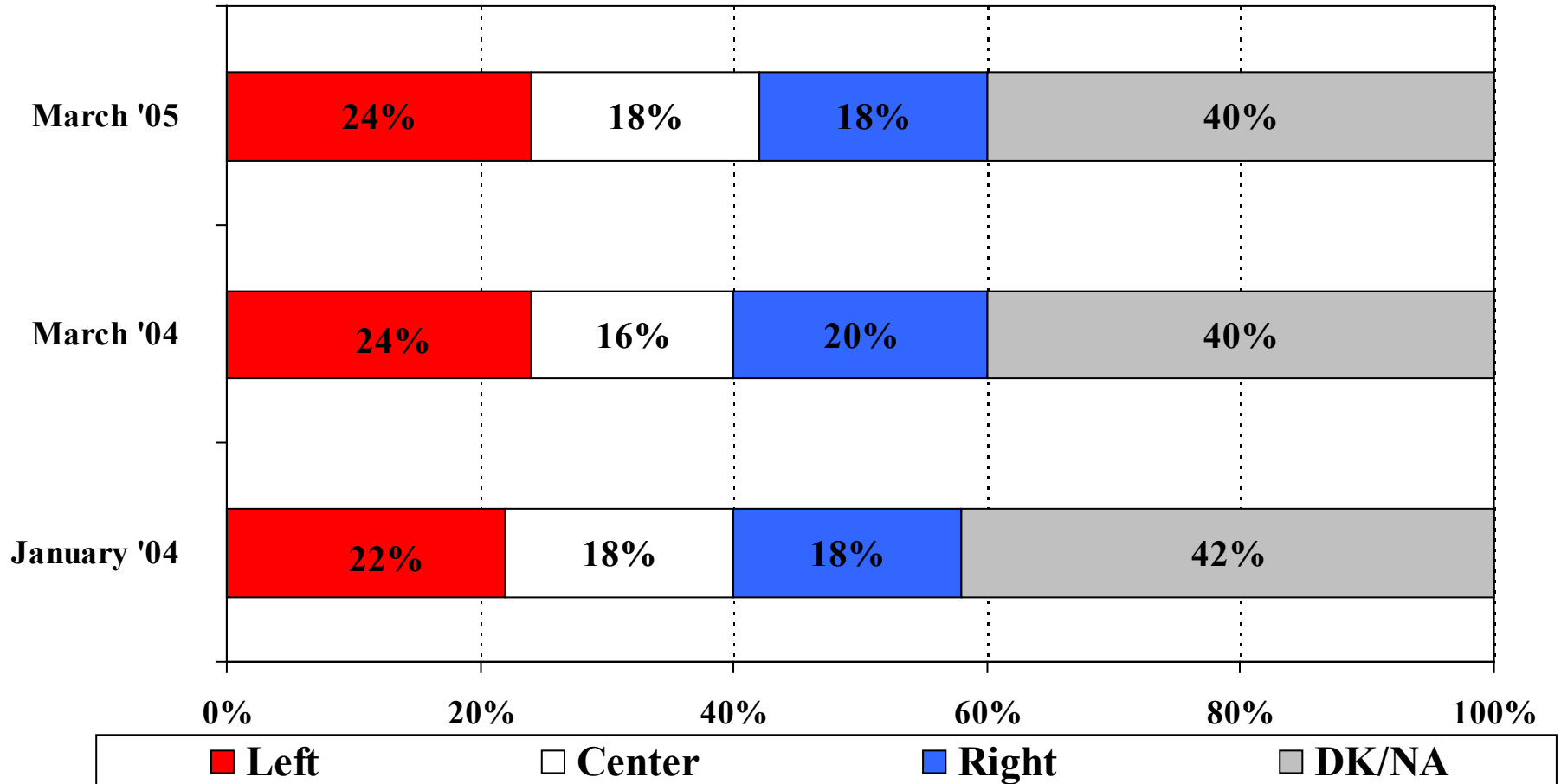
Now I am going to read you a list of political parties. For each please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of them



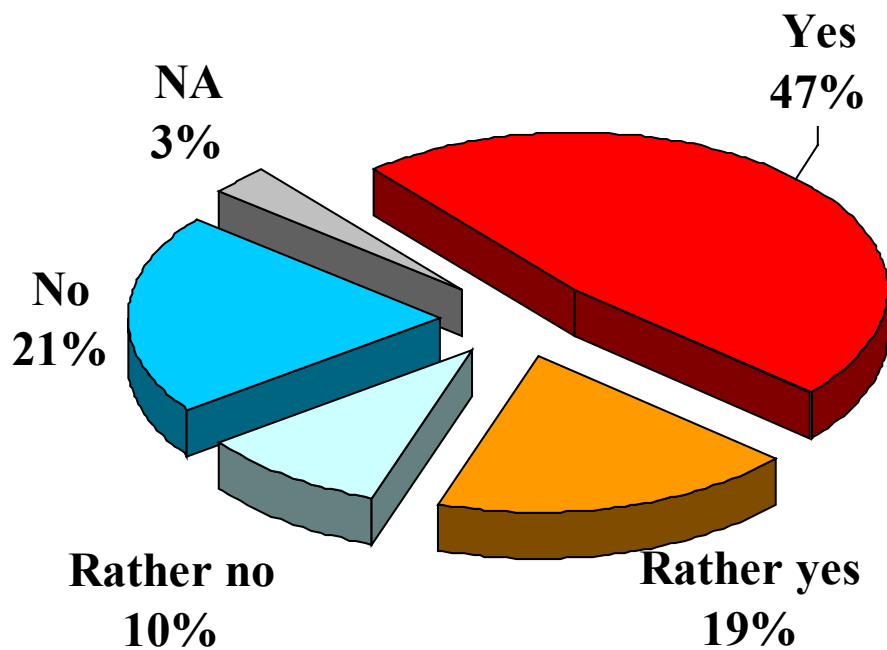
Now I am going to read you a list of political coalition. For each please tell me if you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion?



Please tell me how would you evaluate your political position, using the political scale “Right-Left”?



Do you intend to vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections this year?



March '05

If parliamentary elections were held today which party would you vote for?

